

Press Release

CONNECTICUT'S 'FIRST' FREEDOM SCHOOL PROGRAM COMES TO BRIDGEPORT OFFERING A FREE SUMMER EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS

Bridgeport, CT – May 13, 2010 – Taking the first step for Connecticut, the Mount Aery Development Corporation, Bridgeport Public Schools and the University of Bridgeport are partnering to launch a summer program that will enhance the learning experience for its city's students. The Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools is a six week program designed to help children fall in love with reading, increase their self-esteem, and generate more positive attitudes toward learning. Mount Aery Baptist Church is the host site for the program which will kick off on Monday, July 5th through Friday, August 13th 2010 from 8:30am to 4:00 pm.

At a press conference on **Monday, May 17th at 6pm** located at **Mount Aery Baptist Church on 73 Frank Street, Bridgeport**, leaders of the church and school system will come together to formally announce the state's first and only Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools.

Mount Aery Development Corporation, Bridgeport Public Schools and University of Bridgeport are joining this national movement developed in 1995 by the Children's Defense Fund, a national advocacy organization that devotes particular attention to the needs of the disadvantaged and minority children and those with disabilities.

The summer experience is available for free to 50 students from Bridgeport and the surrounding communities. Applications were accepted on a first come, first serve basis.

"It is the responsibility of the church and the development corporation to transcend out of these four walls into the communities we serve, and partnering with the Bridgeport Public Schools and the University of Bridgeport in this national effort is allowing us to do just that on behalf of our children," said Dr. Anthony L. Bennett Senior Pastor of Mount Aery Baptist Church. "The Mount Aery Development Corporation has a long history of educating our youth through unique programs, and this Freedom Schools Summer Experience is another effort that will allow us to reach out to our youth. We want to thank Dr. Ramos, his executive staff, and Dean Ken Holmes of the University of Bridgeport for their dedication to this effort and for partnering with us on behalf of Bridgeport's children."

"Mount Aery Baptist Church and the development corporation are a beacon in this community," Superintendent Dr. John J. Ramos said, "and we are excited about this partnership allowing our scholars to enjoy a free, fun and educational summer experience. This year we are licensed for 50 students but are hoping that our surrounding community will join us so that we may offer this opportunity to others in our community. Learning doesn't take a vacation and the Freedom School Program brings a whole new meaning to that philosophy."

The program will be staffed primarily by students from University of Bridgeport who are committed to active lives of leadership and service to children. Other staff members have been recruited from Housatonic Community College, Southern Connecticut State University and Gateway Community College.

The *CDF Freedom Schools* program provides summer and after-school enrichment through a model curriculum that supports children and families around five essential components:

1. High quality academic enrichment
2. Parent and family involvement
3. Social action and civic engagement
4. Intergenerational servant leadership development
5. Nutrition, health and mental health

In partnership with faith institutions, schools, colleges and universities, and community based organizations; the *CDF Freedom Schools* program boosts student motivation to read, generates more positive attitudes toward learning, and connects the needs of children and families to the resources in their communities.

The *CDF Freedom Schools* model incorporates the totality of the Children's Defense Fund's mission by fostering environments that support children and young adults to excel and believe in their ability to make a difference in themselves and in their families, schools, communities, nation, and world. College-age young adults are trained as servant leader interns to deliver the integrated reading curriculum (IRC), while site coordinators and project directors provide supervision and administrative oversight.

CDF Freedom Schools program sites are safe and restorative learning spaces where:

- children are surrounded by caring adults and college age young adults from their community (in a classroom ratio of 1:10) who share their enthusiasm for learning and reading, and commit to serving them as authentic mentors;
- children read high quality books and are engaged in learning activities that are appropriate to their developmental needs and interests;
- each day begins with "Harambee!," a 30-minute activity to celebrate and affirm the value of each participant and prepare for the work and learning ahead
- children receive two nutritious meals and a healthy snack each day in the summer model, and nutritious snacks during the after-school program;
- parents are engaged as site volunteers and participate in weekly workshops on children's developmental needs, civic responsibility, and other topics of interest;
- children are encouraged to dream, set goals for themselves, and cultivate positive attitudes and high expectations;
- young people whose lives have been interrupted and impacted by crises receive consistent, daily service to better understand themselves, their situations, each other, and their potential; and families have access to free and high quality childcare.

Since 1995, over 70,000 children have had a *CDF Freedom Schools* experience and more than 7,000 college students, and 1,500 adult site coordinators and project directors have been trained to deliver this empowering model. In the summer of 2008, *CDF Freedom Schools* sponsor partners served nearly 9,000 children in 61 cities in 24 states.